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# THIS "REVIEW": A REMINISCENCE

BY HENRY CABOT LODGE, UNITED STATES SENATOR

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THE battle of Waterloo, although it may be deemed a small affair compared to the continuous fighting of millions of men in the war which we just now are sadly watching, nevertheless had some far-reaching results, and certainly may be said to have made the year 1815 a memorable one in history. But it did not make everything or everybody who chanced to come into being in that same period memorable, although many persons no doubt felt a certain reflected glory in being able to announce that they were born in the Waterloo year. To them it was probably a chronological convenience, and at best it was that and nothing more to THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, which then first saw the light.

There was, however, one bit of good fortune for THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW in being born at that precise time, for it was the period when quarterly reviews in the first freshness of youth were delighting the English-speaking world and were not only commanding attention and influence, but also were becoming, which was far more profitable, both popular and fashionable. The *Edinburgh Review* was founded in 1802, and proved so successful and effective that John Murray, feeling strongly that the Tories required a defender of like character, brought out the *Quarterly* in 1809. In 1811 the *British*, destined to a life of only fourteen years, appeared; and *Blackwood's*, of more frequent publication, came out for the first time in 1817. Clever men, some of real ability, and much distinction later, had launched the *Edinburgh Review*, which set a pace not attained by any of its rivals, able as some of them were. Yet that which really secured to the English reviews of that period a lasting fame, and gave them a place in the memories of men, was not what they did well, but that which they did very ill. It was their sins, both of omission and commission, which fastened upon them the attention of history and of literature.

Literary criticism, which proved in this way their passport to posterity, was in those days occasionally vigorous, but almost invariably crude, rough, strongly colored by political or social prejudices, and often unintelligent and coarsely personal. In scattering this criticism broadcast it so chanced that the quarterly and monthly reviewers quite accidentally fell in with certain great geniuses, whom they neither recognized nor understood, and they attained by this association an enduring, if unenviable, fame. No one, for example, would know to-day that the *British Review* ever existed if it had not been referred to in "Don Juan" as "My Grandmother's Review, the British"; still less would any one be aware of the fact that its editor was named Roberts, if Byron had not written a letter to that gentleman, which is still most excellent and amusing reading.

That Keats was hurried to his untimely death by vulgar articles in the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood's* is one of the firmest of literary traditions. They had, as a matter of fact, little or no effect upon Keats, who took them with sensible and undisturbed contempt. The cruel disease which killed Keats was not the work of critics, but of nature. Byron, however, who had written abominably about Keats in his private letters, took the view that the critics had driven him to his death, and then wrote, "Review people have no more right to kill than any other footpads." He followed this up by the famous and flippant lines in "Don Juan":

'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle,  
Should let itself be snuffed out by an article.

Then Shelley, who admired Keats, came to his defense, as he had come to his assistance in other ways, with all the warmth and generosity of which he was so largely capable. He wrote "Adonais," the greatest poem on the death of a friend which the language can show, greater even than "Lycidas" or "In Memoriam," and there he said:

Live thou, whose infamy is not thy fame!  
Live! fear no heavier chastisement from me,  
Thou noteless blot on a remembered name!

thus sending the reviewer and the *Quarterly* down to an assured, if unattractive, immortality. Byron and Shelley fixed the popular belief in the effect of the criticism upon Keats, and so final is the word of genius that historical facts contend in vain against it, and the worthless reviews and the *Quarterly* and the

magazine which carried them became fixed in literary history. As the world persisted in accepting the tradition about Keats, a distorted knowledge of the reviews of those days has necessarily gone with it.

Then came Jeffrey, a man of very different caliber from the vulgar nobodies who told Keats "to go back to his gallipots." Jeffrey was a good critic; he wrote well, although it is to be suspected that the three volumes of his essays are little read now. In 1820 he wrote of Keats in a way which showed that he detected the great genius long before it was generally perceived. But in his review of Wordsworth's "Excursion" he began with the famous sentence, "This will never do," and those four words have become proverbial as proof of the ignorance and fatuity of critics. It is an easy way to dispose of literary criticism, which in the hands of the masters is one of the finest, best, and most suggestive of all forms of literature, by recalling that Jeffrey said of the "Excursion," "This will never do." The remark is commonly made by persons who know, or think that they know, what they like, who mistake liking for criticism, and who probably have never read the "Excursion." If they had, while they would not agree probably with Byron's verses:

A drowsy, frouzy poem called the "Excursion,"  
Writ in a manner which is my aversion,

they would nevertheless see that there was an element of truth in Jeffrey's sentence and that the remarks which followed it were not unworthy of consideration.

In the same or in even coarser ways than those employed with Keats, did the reviewers deal with Coleridge and Lamb, with Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt; in a word, with practically all the geniuses and all the men of real literary talent of that period, whom the world still remembers and loves. This gave to the critical Reviews born at the beginning of the nineteenth century an importance in later times much above their merits, but it also created at the moment conditions highly favorable to the success of the American venture, which may be fairly compared with and tested by its contemporaries. We are apt to associate the English quarterlies and magazines, in their first twenty-five years, with Macaulay, and Carlyle, and in a less degree, with Sydney Smith, Jeffrey, and Hazlitt. But prolific as were all these men, and imposing as was the work of the first two, it is well to remember that however much char-

acter they gave in their time to periodical writing, they really contributed but a small part of the many printed pages which came forth every quarter or every month.

Most of those pages at best were the work of writers like Brougham, Croker, and Southey, now quite unread, but as a rule were produced by men whose very names and existence are wholly and justly forgotten. If we compare the early numbers of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* with its English prototypes and contemporaries, we shall find, after setting aside Carlyle, Macaulay, and Hazlitt, that the average work in *THE NORTH AMERICAN* was quite up to if not beyond the level of the average of like work in England. It was certainly more sober and more decent, for it never descended to the brutal violence of "Christopher North" or to the vulgar personalities of the reviewers of Keats. Published in the neighborhood of our oldest university, *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* drew to its pages not only the best and most serious writers in the country, but all that we possessed of scholarship, and although we had comparatively few scholars in those days, yet there was both honest scholarship and genuine learning at the service of *THE REVIEW*. So it came to pass that *THE REVIEW* prospered in a modest way and attained to a high position of dignity and authority in our little world of letters to which, and to American literature, it rendered real service in the days when such service was sorely needed. The degree of its authority is shown by the remark of Dr. Holmes, that the mere omission of any notice of *Morton's Hope* in *THE NORTH AMERICAN* was a heavy blow to the first novel by Motley, who was destined later to such eminence as an historian. Its reputation, moreover, extended beyond the borders of the United States. Wordsworth in a letter to Lord Lonsdale, in 1827, says that the best article upon the Reform Bill which he had seen was one in *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, although he did not approve the writer's doctrines and principles. Wordsworth was no lover of reviews and magazines, and usually spoke of them with dislike and contempt. What he says, therefore, coming at about the time of Sydney Smith's famous question, "Who reads an American book?" is of interest, for it shows that *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* was not only read in England, but had acquired there a recognized standing and reputation.

I have said thus much about the origin of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, the atmosphere into which it was born, and the position to which it attained in our literature and as

an influence upon public opinion, because only in this way could I explain what it meant to me when I became connected with it. As a boy I grew to be familiar with its external appearance, with the quiet light-brown or grayish color of its covers, for it was constantly before my eyes upon the library table or in the hands of its readers. It was one of the household institutions. But even to a boy inclined to read any printed words, it offered nothing of interest. There were neither stories nor pictures within its sober leaves. I looked upon it as a grave and solemn work in which only grown-up persons could possibly be interested, but I had a dim, respectful feeling for it as representing very serious and important things. I doubt if I ever read a page of *THE REVIEW* before I went to college, and not many, even then; but the reverential sentiment which one feels for an institution intertwined with all one's life and memories never deserted me whenever I thought of *THE NORTH AMERICAN*, as it was familiarly called.

Thus it fell out that when, after I had returned from Europe in 1872 and had spent a dreary year in studying the origins of Anglo-Saxon law among the Teutonic tribes, which did not do much to satisfy certain vague literary aspirations then floating through my mind, the offer of the assistant-editorship of *THE NORTH AMERICAN*, made to me by Mr. Henry Adams, came as a splendid surprise of the very first magnitude. I can only describe this event, so momentous to me, by repeating what I said of it in a volume of *Reminiscences* which I published rather more than a year ago:

Then one day Henry Adams, who had recently returned from Europe, appeared at luncheon; and afterwards, as I was walking down with him to take the wagon for Lynn, he told me that he had accepted the editorship of *THE NORTH AMERICAN* and wished me to be his assistant editor. I have had since that summer morning in 1873 my share of rewards and honors, more, very likely, than I have deserved; but nothing has ever come to me which gave me such joy as that offer from Henry Adams. I know the exact spot on the road where he made the announcement to me, and I can see the familiar scene as it looked upon that eventful day. I came home, my heart swelling with pride and with a feeling of intense relief, for it seemed to me that the darkness in which I had been groping had suddenly lifted and that at last I could see my way to doing something. *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, then a quarterly, old, famous, and respected, appeared to me, who had always looked at its pages with distant awe, one of the most important publications in the world. To be connected with it, to have a chance to write for it, was a dazzling

prospect which I had never dreamed would open to me, except possibly after long years. Now I was to be one of its editors. I trod on air as I walked, and the whole world was changed.

As to what I did, what my work was in my new position, I must quote again from my *Early Memories*, for I do not think that I could put the little story any better if I were to try to reword it here:

My duties on THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW began at once. I read manuscripts and proof and aided Mr. Adams in every way in preparing each number for the press. I learned much in this manner from my chief's instruction as to methods of criticism and also as to style. Very early in my apprenticeship I remember his handing to me an article by an eminent local historian and antiquary, and saying: "We shall print this article, of course, but I wish you to go over it and strike out all superfluous words, and especially all needless adjectives." I faithfully performed my task and found, to my surprise, when I had finished, that, without changing or cutting down the article, I had shortened it by several pages. It was a valuable lesson. At the same time I received much more important and much more direct instruction than this. Like most beginners, I was prone to write long and involved sentences. Mr. Adams insisted that the very first step was to learn to write clearly, in short and simple sentences, and that when that difficulty had been mastered the greater and finer art of ornament and of choosing words, wherein one's ideal is never attained, would follow. He sent me to Swift to study simplicity of style as well as force and energy of expression, because these qualities are exhibited in the highest degree by that great master of English prose. He encouraged me to write critical notices for THE REVIEW, but was very severe when it came to the question of acceptance. My first article, about a page in length, which attained the honor of publication, was a critical notice of Baxmann's *History of the Popes*. I rewrote it eight times before it passed muster. It looks very dry and abrupt to me now, but I can see that it was at least clear, and that no one could fail to understand the sentences or what I was trying to say. I went on writing critical notices, some quite elaborate and involving much work, but three years elapsed before I rose to the dignity of a leading article. The appearance of my essay upon Alexander Hamilton in 1876 was another epoch in my life, and I wish I could again feel about anything the glow of pride which filled my being when the number containing it appeared.

I am aware that this passage which I have just quoted from my own book tells chiefly, as was appropriate, of course, in its original place, about the effect upon me and my fortunes of helping to edit THE REVIEW and does not say much about

THE REVIEW itself. And yet I do not know that there is much more to be said. Mr. Adams was a very able editor. THE REVIEW under his control more than maintained the high position which it had held for so many years. But the day of the quarterly, in the United States at least, had come to an end. In England the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, perhaps one or two others, have continued. They still have there a small but steady constituency who like quarterlies and who cling to the old traditions. They still have men of learning, accomplishment, and high training, who are willing to give much labor and time to writing long and serious articles in the best manner, and for what is in these days a very small remuneration. The quarterlies born in the first quarter of the nineteenth century belong to the days of the stage-coach and the post-road. Everything then was more deliberate, and the quarterly suited the period. To the vital change effected by the railroad and the telegraph, to the quickening of life which they brought with them, we in America were more responsive and more susceptible than the English, whose fashion we had followed in the matter of the quarterly reviews, as in other more important things.

So it came to pass that, when the United States was celebrating the Centennial Anniversary of our National Independence, it was quite apparent that there was no hope of profit in a quarterly, and it was also painfully evident that many of the best writers could not write for us when so much better rewards awaited them in the great monthly illustrated magazines then reaching their zenith of prosperity and popularity. To the publishers the situation was practically serious, and Mr. Adams and I quite understood and approved their action when they sold THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW to Mr. Allen Thorndike Rice. Thereupon my connection with THE REVIEW, except as an occasional contributor, terminated, but not my interest in its fortunes. With its adventures subsequent to that time I have nothing to do and, of course, nothing to tell. Since I ceased to be an editor of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW there have been many great changes in human life and environment. The steamship, the railroad, and the telegraph, which made a new world for the quarterlies of the stage-coach and post-road days, are still with us, developed beyond the wildest dreams of their inventors, and yet have been so long a part of our daily life as to seem never to have had a youth or a beginning. To them have been added the motor-car, the telephone,



the wireless message, and the aeroplane. The quickening of life by steam and electricity, which began less than a century ago, has thus been constantly accelerated. We are farther removed than ever from the days when the quarterly reviews burst upon an interested world. Forty years ago they were thought too slow for a community which demanded their current literature at least once a month. Now we live in a time when apparently people wish to have a newspaper fresh from the press during every hour of daylight, so that we are treated to afternoon editions which appear before noon is reached. Yet *THE NORTH AMERICAN* survives, more frequent in publication than at the outset, but more vigorous than ever. Best of all, after many wanderings and in these days of haste and hurry, the restoration of the qualities which gave it its old position has been found possible, and the criticism of literature and the purely literary articles have returned to its pages, where they were once thought to be fatal to popularity and to sale. To those who are interested in American literature and letters, this is encouraging in a direction where encouragement is much needed, and should be a matter for congratulation to all who care to see serious subjects seriously and ably treated, whose intellectual appetities are not wholly satisfied by pictures, and who would not have literature forgotten in a great periodical review. It is an especial satisfaction to one who, like myself, has a personal affection for our century-old *REVIEW*, and who cannot even repeat the name without calling up some happy memories from a past which now seems very distant in this fast-moving if not always-improving world.

HENRY CABOT LODGE.



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